

Grudge Stew - How to Stir Up a War

By Toni Lee Robinson

As the 1800s got underway, America faced some problems. The fledgling nation had broken loose from Britain. In some ways, however, the "old" nation refused to accept the independence of the new one. For one thing, the British insisted on the right to stop American ships on the high seas. They needed to do this, they said, in order to search for deserters from the Royal Navy.

Conditions on British ships were quite miserable. Many British sailors "jumped ship" the first chance they got. These deserters often took jobs on U.S. merchant vessels. Some even enlisted in the tiny U.S. Navy. At the time, Britain was embroiled in a naval war with France. She was in desperate need of sailors to man her warships.

In searches of U.S. ships, however, British officers usually "found" more than their deserters. Both *naturalized* (those born in another nation who had become Americans) and native-born Americans were taken. The men were forced to work on British ships. Experts say as many as nine thousand Americans were dragged off to man British ships. This high-handed method of recruiting was called *impressment*. It was deeply resented by Americans.

In 1807, the British warship Leopard met the U.S. frigate Chesapeake off the coast of Virginia. The Leopard's commander demanded to search the U.S. ship for deserters. Captain Barron of the Chesapeake refused. The Leopard then fired broadside at the frigate. Three men were killed and eighteen wounded. British officers boarded the frigate and seized four men. One of the men was, in fact, a British deserter. The other three were Americans.

News of the attack made Americans very angry. British officials later offered to return the American sailors and pay damages. The offer did little to calm tensions between the two countries. Meanwhile, the war between France and Britain was heating up. Neutral ships became a highly sought prize of war. While both France and Britain harassed U.S. ships, Britain was the worst offender on the high seas.

The shipping problem seemed to point out Britain's disdain for American rights. But citizens on America's western frontier had other grievances as well. The Northwest Territory was becoming a war zone all its own. Britain was suspected of inciting Native American tribes to fight U.S. settlers.

Settlers were pushing farther and farther west. Native American lands were becoming farms for white settlers. President Jefferson's Republican Indian Policy gave the natives two choices. They could either join "civilization" or move farther west. Understandably, many native people resisted this land grab. Tecumseh, a Shawnee leader, urged all tribes to fight the intrusion.

All along the western frontier, Native Americans responded to his call. Territorial troops were called out to put down the uprising. They reported that the native fighters were equipped with British guns and supplies. Word spread of a British plot to influence native tribes to rise up against the U.S. This added more fuel to the fire. American anger toward the British reached the boiling point.

Some Americans were more eager than others to go back to war with their old foe. These "War Hawks" were part of a new power base in Congress. They were led by Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. The new congressmen represented people in the west and south who were up in arms about the "Indian problem." Most blamed the native hostility on British schemes.

If the truth be told, people of the western and southern frontiers had another concern as well. They wanted more property. They wanted to eliminate the British presence in Canada and claim the vast land for the U.S. They also wanted to push Spain, an ally of Britain, out of Florida. They sought to rid North America of the



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presence of any other nation. How could their goal be accomplished?

War with Britain seemed the logical answer to this question. In fact, with the War Hawks in power, war with Britain was seen as the answer to just about any question. Seizure of U.S. ships and kidnapping of citizens by the British had cooked up a fine pot of grudge stew in the U.S. British arms in the hands of Native American fighters had kept the pot bubbling. The War Hawks kept stirring the brew until it boiled over into war.

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Questions

1. Explain the practice of impressment. Why might this anger Americans?

2. A naturalized citizen is one who:

- A. Is of questionable citizenship
- B. Holds citizenship in two countries
- C. Was born in another country and has changed citizenship
- D. Eats only organic foods

3. Describe the encounter between the Leopard and the Chesapeake.

4. Jefferson's Republican Indian Policy basically:

- A. Set aside the Northwest Territories for Native American residents
- B. Gave Native Americans the right to vote as long as they supported a certain party.
- C. Gave Native Americans the choice of adapting to white settlement or moving out of the territories.
- D. Called for the extermination of native peoples

5. Why were settlers of the U.S. frontier angry at the British as they coped with Native American uprisings?

6. The War Hawks were:

- A. New England merchants who were tired of having ships stolen by the British.
- B. Militant Native American warriors led by Shawnee chief Tecumseh
- C. Men in Congress who were adamantly opposed to war with Britain
- D. Congressional leaders who were anxious to go to war with Britain

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7. People of the western and southern regions of the U.S. wanted to see any foreign presence near them eliminated. What two areas were they concerned about, and who held each area?

8. List the ingredients of the "grudge stew" that was leading the U.S. to war with Britain.

Think of a time you have seen someone "spoiling for a fight." Now, picture someone who avoids conflict at all costs. What might the pitfalls of each extreme be?

Do you think there are just reasons for war? If so, what would they be? If not, why not?



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